



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk (860)441-6640
Town Manager
(860)441-6630

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter

Tuesday, January 8, 2008

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Brown-Tracy

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor Kolnaski noted the school openings went very smoothly. Mayor Watson provided the schedule for Board of Education budget deliberations to the Town Manager. Councilor Kolnaski noted she attends all Board of Education budget meetings.

4. Approval of Minutes

2007-0307 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of November 27, 2007 and December 11, 2007 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of information from the Connecticut Siting Council on the Pfizer power generating facility and soliciting comments or concerns with the proposal. Councilor Sheets requested and the Mayor made a referral on this item to the Environment Committee.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2007-0303 Police Pension Agreement

Discussed

Doug Ackerman and Joyce Sauchuk were present to address the Council. Mr. Ackerman explained that there are two components to the Police pension agreement: retirement benefits and retiree health care. Negotiations were protracted as the Town sought concessions on health care benefits. There were few changes on the benefits side. Mr. Ackerman reviewed highlights of the agreement. He noted three areas of substantial savings for the Town: 1) retiree coverage is now tied to active employees' benefits; 2) the percentage of premium paid by the retiree is not fixed at the actual age of retirement; and 3) the contract eliminates major medical coverage for future retirees over age 65. Mr. Ackerman reviewed costs/savings to the Town as a result of the agreement.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0301 Adjustment to AFSCME Retiree Benefits

Discussed

Mr. Ackerman noted that all pension agreements have a provision allowing for discussion every two years of benefit increases. The adjustment to benefits is not subject to arbitration; it is the Town Council's sole discretion to approve or disapprove the increase. Staff is recommending a 3% increase for benefits of \$1,000 or greater. Mr. Ackerman reviewed the cost to the Town of the recommended increase.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0302 Adjustment to CILU Retiree Benefits

Discussed

See discussion under 2007-0301 Adjustment to AFSCME Retiree Benefits in 1/8/08 Committee of the Whole Minutes.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0310 FYE 2009 Budget

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that in years past the Council has conducted a pre-budget public hearing. The public hearing is not required by the Charter. If the Town Council desires to continue the practice this year, staff is proposing the first meeting in February.

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to conduct a pre-budget public hearing on February 5th at 7:00 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.

The Town Manager also asked if the Council would like to meet with the Board of Education, City of Groton, and Groton Long Point, and asked for suggested dates. The consensus of the Council was to meet with all three entities.

The Town Manager distributed a calendar for the purposes of scheduling budget review sessions. He reviewed milestone dates defined by the Charter, and discussion followed on a date for the Budget Public Hearing.

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to conduct a public hearing on the FYE 2009 Budget on March 31st at 7:00 p.m. at the Groton senior Center.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Dates identified for budget review were 4/5, 4/7, 4/8, and 4/12 with 4/16 if needed.

2007-0305 FYE 2007 CAFR

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger distributed the FYE 2007 CAFR. The Town's auditor will make a formal presentation at the next Committee of the Whole meeting on January 22nd. The Town Manager asked Councilors to call with any specific questions or concerns prior to the meeting.

2007-0140 Town Property at Buddington/Old Buddington Roads**Discussed**

Mayor Watson noted that he discovered a 1998 opinion from the Town Attorney advising that this transfer should go before the Planning Commission and RTM. Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of a positive response on the CGS 8-24 referral from the Planning Commission. Staff distributed a communication from Mike Carey recommending that this item go to the RTM just to be safe, in case there could ever be an interpretation that the Town intended to hold onto this property.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern that Attorney Carey's opinion conflicts with Attorney Duggan's. Town Manager Oefinger clarified that Attorney Duggan has outlined a policy for going forward whereby once a property is foreclosed, the Town Council will make a conscious decision whether or not it will be held for a Town use, in which case any future transfer would require CGS 8-24 review by the Planning Commission and RTM approval. Town Manager Oefinger explained the past practice.

Mayor Watson made a referral to the Committee of the Whole to discuss this issue in greater detail.

Discussion followed on changing the wording of the resolution to "offer" the property for sale, rather than "sell" the property.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Opposed: 1 - Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

2003-0177 Renovations & Additions to Groton School Facilities - Phase I**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted the two new elementary schools opened yesterday and there were very positive comments generated from the open houses. There is still some work to do in terms of finish work, punch list items, and technology.

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted technology still needs to be purchased and installed. Most of the furniture and fixtures have been delivered. Staff is now working on contract closeout, certifications and warranties, and completion of paperwork and documentation.

At Fitch High School, move in by the Board of Education is scheduled for February 18th. Staff is meeting weekly to review issues and identify alternatives in case of unanticipated circumstances. Furniture will arrive on time for the opening, but again, technology will be delayed.

Rick Norris explained that after students move in to the new academic wing, contractors will start abatement in the areas to be demolished and renovations in other areas.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town is continuing to work with the Old Mystic Fire Department on a route for a dry fire line.

Mr. Norris noted 9:00 a.m. programs on January 26th at Catherine Kolnaski School and February 2nd at Northeast Academy, followed by tours of the buildings. The snow date is February 9th.

2006-0282 School Improvement Project - Phase II

Discussed

The Phase II School Design Committee met with representatives of JCJ Architecture regarding developing a scope of planning services for Phase II. Councilor O'Beirne asked staff to seek an opinion from the Town Attorney regarding the need to go out to bid on a contract.

2008-0013**Adoption of Rules for Twenty-Sixth Town Council****Discussed**

The Temporary Rules Committee was chaired by Councilor Streeter. Councilor Bond expressed a number of objections to the proposed rules. She cited the limit on Councilors' time to speak, the limit on citizens' time to speak, yielding the floor to someone as opposed recognizing them, and restricting consideration of "substantially" the same referral.

Councilor Sheets agreed and added that she rejects the inability of a Councilor to place an item on the agenda for the Council's consideration. Councilor Sheets distributed a proposed amendment to the rules. She stated she has a problem not being able to have input into the agendas and she feels as if the Council is being "managed".

She asked Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent to research whether other towns restrict a councilor's ability to place an item on an agenda.

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter

Opposed: 2 - Councilor Bond and Councilor Sheets

2007-0308**Boards and Commissions Appointments Policy****Discussed**

Councilor O'Beirne noted a continuing move to engage more unaffiliated voters.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0072**Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief - Update****Discussed**

Councilor Bond asked that this item be tabled to January 22nd. Councilor O'Beirne asked staff to prepare a one page summary of the Citizens Committee's recommendation.

2008-0014**Par Four Restaurant Lease****Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted ongoing discussions with the owners of Par 4 regarding a lease. He hopes to be able to distribute a draft of the lease on January 22nd. The restaurant owners are looking for a long term lease that will allow them to make some improvements to the space and the Town is looking to establish incentives for energy conservation.

2007-0261**Town Clerk Compensation****Recommended for a Resolution**

Mayor Watson asked Councilors what process they would like to use to evaluate the Town Clerk. The consensus of the Committee, with the agreement of Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox, was to discuss this issue in the public meeting.

Ms. Tarbox briefly reviewed some of her duties, noting that the Town Clerk's Office does a good job and she has completed the tasks assigned to her.

Councilor Sheets asked about staffing concerns previously raised by the Town Clerk. Ms. Tarbox noted that the office has overcome all of the difficulties and no closures of the office have been required in over a year.

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to rate the Town Clerk's performance as "exceeds expectations" and raise her annual salary to \$85,500.

The motion carried unanimously

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Mayor Watson noted receipt of three referral requests:

- *Tax Credit for Volunteer Firemen (Councilor Sheets) - Finance*
- *Neighborhood Online Watch Website (Councilor Streeter) - Public Safety*
- *Global Warming Assessment (Councilor Sheets) - Environment*

Councilor Bond requested a referral to the Finance Committee on P.A. 127-13 which allows municipalities to abate property tax on commercial fishermen's property.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Bond, to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.